

# Suicide Awareness and Prevention

## Welcome

### **Notes:**

Welcome to the Behavioral Health Awareness module on “Suicide Awareness & Prevention.”

The ability to recognize and effectively intervene with individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts and behaviors is one of the most challenging and important aspects of crisis intervention. This course is recommended for people without formal mental health training who want to increase their awareness and knowledge of suicide, including how to help someone experiencing a mental health crisis.

Additional resources are available by selecting the Resources link in the top right corner of the window.

If you have visual or auditory assistance needs, please select the Accessibility On/Off button for help with this training.

## A Troubling Statistic

### **Notes:**

In the United States, one suicide occurs every 12 minutes, but together we can help prevent this from happening.

## What You Will Learn

### **Notes:**

In this training, we'll have a candid discussion about suicide. Although this is a growing and serious problem, there is hope.



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This table of contents provides an outline for what you will learn. We invite you to explore the following chapters that address questions you may have about the topic.

You also have the option to move freely about the module using the player menu on the left hand side of the window. You are free to start, stop, or pause the module at any time.

## Introduction

### **Notes:**

Suicide is on the rise globally, accounting for nearly one million deaths annually. The suicide rate has increased by over 30% in the last 20 years, and in 2016, suicide became the 2nd leading cause of death among ages 10-34. Over the past decade, the rates of children hospitalized for suicidal thoughts or behaviors have doubled.

Suicide is becoming a bigger and bigger issue. The rising suicide rates call on each of us to pay closer attention to how the people we know and love are coping with life. Just because someone's life appears good on the outside doesn't mean all is well in their more private moments.

The rise of mental health conditions like anxiety and depression also prompt us to pay attention to those around us. Overuse of social media is likely contributing to rising levels of loneliness and contributing to more anxiety, greater levels of social disconnection, and more intense feelings of despair. Conversations about suicide can be tough, but the rising rates tell us they are important to have.

## Myths About Suicide

### **Notes:**

It might feel difficult to bring up this topic with someone in your life. We might feel afraid of making situations worse, or we fear we don't quite know how to approach a conversation. Unfortunately, people commonly hold misconceptions about suicide that add confusion and make the topic even harder to talk about. When having conversations with loved ones who might be struggling, it's important to be aware of how you might be spreading or reinforcing



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these myths and misconceptions. Here you'll find four common misconceptions that can be harmful to both individuals dealing with suicidal thoughts as well as loved ones trying to recover from the consequences of suicide in their lives. Take some time to explore each of these myths.

### ***Myth #1***

Talking about suicide may give someone the idea to kill themselves or will make them more likely to kill themselves.

Sometimes, people worry that asking about suicidal thoughts might plant the idea in someone's head. But in reality, people often feel a sense of relief when asked because they finally get the chance to talk about their thoughts with someone. Many times, people struggling with suicidal thoughts wrestle with them in silence. Asking about them creates an opening for those dealing with these thoughts to be genuine with others and share their burden. After discussing their thoughts with another person, they may feel that a weight has been lifted. Providing an opportunity for someone to speak honestly about their experience can open the door of healing for them. Being open and nonjudgmental can be incredibly helpful to someone who feels isolated or ashamed.

### ***Myth #2***

People who attempt suicide but do not die by suicide are looking for attention.

Any suicide attempt, even if it is not lethal in nature, must be taken very seriously. Behavior is often a form of communication, and a suicide attempt communicates that someone may be suffering in pain and they need someone to intervene.

Suicide attempts are not driven by a single motivation for everyone. For some, suicide is seen as the only solution to chronic emotional or physical pain. Other times, a person may feel overwhelmed and unable to resolve negative life events. For others, a suicide attempt may be a means of communicating to others their severe suffering and the seriousness of their need. All suicide attempts should be taken seriously, and appropriate help should be sought for the person.



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## ***Myth #3***

Suicide happens without warning.

Most people who attempt or die by suicide often communicate warning signs through their words or behaviors beforehand. These warning signs can include making statements like:

- “I want to kill myself”
- “I wish I were dead”
- “I feel hopeless”
- “There’s no reason to live”
- “I just want the pain to end”
- “I’m too much of a burden”
- “I feel trapped”

Other warning signs can include behaviors, such as:

- Seeking access to means to kill oneself (pills, weapon)
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Giving away prized possessions
- Calling others to say goodbye
- Talking or writing about death
- Isolating from others
- Withdrawing from activities
- Researching ways to die by suicide

If you notice that someone is saying statements like these or starting to engage in these behaviors, it is important to ask them about how they are doing. Again, starting an open conversation about this possibility and sharing concern does not increase the chances someone will attempt suicide.

## ***Myth #4***

Only people with mental health conditions attempt suicide.



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Not all people who attempt suicide have issues with their mental health, and many people with mental health conditions don't have suicidal thoughts. Many factors can contribute to a person's decision to attempt suicide. Suicide often occurs when a person's stressors exceed their ability to cope with them. Suicide can occur even in the absence of warning signs. However, by educating yourself about the risk factors associated with suicide, you can be on "high alert" for any potential warning signs. Being sensitive to those around you and paying attention when someone has multiple risk factors for suicide may save a life.

Traumatic Life Events that may contribute to risk of suicide include eviction or loss of home, trauma or abuse, persecution or victim of bullying, criminal or legal issues, death of a loved one or rejection.

Potential Risk Factors that have been associated with increased risk of suicide include limited social support or being single, being a white male or being middle aged, access to lethal means, mental health condition, or a drug or alcohol use disorder.

## Reflection Point

### **Notes:**

This article recently appeared on a local news website. Select all the myths about suicide perpetuated by the article.

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### **Unexpected Loss Raises Questions**

The family of a respected businessman, James Doe, is struggling to understand his death by suicide. "We never imagined that Jim would consider this," said his wife.

Loved ones reported that Mr. Doe was deeply upset by a recent bankruptcy, but he was never diagnosed with clinical depression. "He would occasionally say, 'I just wish I could put an end to it all,'" continued Mrs. Doe, "but we thought it was better to focus on the positive."

The family encourages anyone struggling with thoughts of suicide to contact the national suicide prevention lifeline.



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Correct	Choice
Yes	Talking about suicide may give someone the idea to kill themselves or will make them more likely to kill themselves.
No	People who attempt suicide but do not die by suicide are looking for attention.
Yes	Suicide happens without warning.
Yes	Only people with mental health conditions attempt suicide.

### ***Feedback when correct:***

That's right. After his death, Mr. Doe's family started to see that he was not immune to suicidal thoughts, that warning signs and risk factors were present, and that they could have addressed his statements more directly. There was no evidence that loved ones thought Mr. Doe was seeking attention.

### ***Feedback when incorrect:***

Let's Review. After his death, Mr. Doe's family started to see that he was not immune to suicidal thoughts, that warning signs and risk factors were present, and that they could have addressed his statements more directly. There was no evidence that loved ones thought Mr. Doe was seeking attention.

## **Malia's Story**

### ***Notes:***

Malia is a 16-year-old female with depression. About 6 weeks ago, Malia stopped taking her antidepressants because they were making her gain weight. Since then, she has been feeling more down, has been crying more frequently, and has been having difficulty concentrating. She also stopped hanging out with her boyfriend and her friends, even though they kept trying to invite her to do things. About 2 weeks ago, her boyfriend broke up with her. To pile onto her overwhelming feelings, she learned last week that she failed her math exam and got a "D" on a paper. Previously, all her grades had been As and Bs. She has finals in 2 weeks, and she doesn't



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know how she is going to study or pass them. She started to think that she is stupid, that she is not cared about by anyone, and that she would be better off not living anymore.

## **Understanding Suicidal Thoughts**

### **Notes:**

Many people will experience suicidal thoughts at some point in their life. Even the “rich and famous” who appear to have everything anyone could desire are vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and dying by suicide. Whether you are experiencing these thoughts yourself or helping another person who is having them, here is some information to help you better understand these thoughts.

### ***Thought A***

Ultimately, suicidal thoughts provide information about how a person is feeling. Often, these thoughts communicate feelings of being overwhelmed or wanting the pain to end. Suicidal thoughts are a red flag that help is needed - they are more a cry for life than a call for death.

### ***Thought B***

Suicidal thoughts can span from “I’m so tired of living”, where someone simply expresses they feel tired of living in pain, to a well-developed thought encompassing a plan of action for death. A wide range of thoughts exists between these two extremes. Some people think about what it would be like to escape but don’t actively plan to follow through. Others view suicide as an escape plan they can use if life becomes too overwhelming.

### ***Thought C***

When people feel overwhelmed, generally manageable issues can loom larger and perspective can be skewed. For example, when someone comes home from a long day at work and is feeling completely exhausted, doing the dishes can feel like an overwhelming task. The next morning after waking up refreshed, that same task might seem manageable. The feelings we have when we are overwhelmed can seem larger than they might feel on another day.



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For someone who is dealing with other conditions like depression, anxiety, or chronic physical pain, these conditions can influence thoughts and feelings and lead to conclusions that drive feelings of hopelessness. The presence of these conditions can influence the severity of suicidal or negative thoughts. While these reasons do not fully capture the complexity of understanding suicidal thoughts, they do provide some initial ideas to consider when someone is struggling with suicide.

## Understanding Malia's Thoughts

### **Notes:**

Knowing what we know, let's try to understand what might be playing into Malia's suicidal thoughts. Malia had previously been getting As and Bs, so she is not unintelligent. Malia has also been isolating herself from her friends despite their efforts to spend time with her. Her thoughts of not being worthy of love are a reaction to her breakup, that is amplified by her isolation. Malia's thoughts are not uncommon. When people feel depressed and overwhelmed, they often view themselves and the world more negatively.

## Talking About Suicidal Thoughts

### **Notes:**

So, what do you do if you think someone might be wrestling with thoughts of suicide? When people are struggling with suicidal thoughts, it is especially important for them to talk with others, to get support, and to have an honest, nonjudgmental discussion about their thoughts. If you are concerned that a friend or family member, or someone else you know may be having suicidal thoughts, let them know your concern.

### **Asking**

Asking is the first step. When asking about suicidal thoughts, be sure not to express negative judgment in your voice tone. Also, do not dismiss possible suicidal thoughts. For example, you would not want to say, "You're not having thoughts of harming yourself are you?" The person is



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more likely to feel ashamed and deny possible thoughts. Instead, be direct and to the point. Don't be afraid to ask someone in your life if they are thinking about suicide. You might ask, "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" Other ways to start the conversation include "I wanted to check in with you because I have been feeling concerned about you", or "I've noticed some differences in you recently and wondered how you are doing." Remember, talking about it actually lowers the likelihood of it occurring, despite how uncomfortable or difficult the conversation might feel. Ask in a direct, non-judgmental way to communicate you are open to the conversation.

### ***Listening***

The other side of asking is listening. If they let you know they are having suicidal thoughts, you may need to press into the conversation further. Asking "Do you have a plan on how you might complete this?" will help you evaluate the current level of risk. Remind them you are there for them and that they are not alone. If this person is a minor, including family members or caregivers is essential. Never promise to keep their thoughts a secret. You are first and foremost there to make sure they get the help they need.

### **Isabella's Story**

#### ***Notes:***

Isabella is a 32-year-old accountant who lost her job about 4 months ago and has had trouble finding a job since then. Losing her job put a financial strain on her marriage, and about 1 month ago, she learned her husband of 9 years had a brief affair with a much younger woman. Isabella's life has not been easy - as a child, her parents divorced when she was young, and her father turned to alcohol. She did not receive much attention from her parents, and as a result, she masked her feelings of depression and anxiety with drugs and alcohol, even as an adolescent. Though she had gone many years without any issues with substance use, she recently started drinking again to cope with her feelings of betrayal, anger, and jealousy about her husband and her worry about her job. Though she had many friends who cared about her, she struggled to confide in them about what was happening because she felt embarrassed about how her life was turning out. She felt like she had to get away from everything but knew



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she had no money or familial support to move or make any big changes. She decided going away forever was her only option.

## Reflection Point

### Notes:

Select all the risk factors that may have contributed to Isabella's suicidal thoughts:

Correct	Choice
Yes	Financial strain
Yes	Relationship strain
Yes	Previous or current substance use
No	Legal problems
No	Desire for attention. This is a myth about suicide.
Yes	Social isolation
Yes	History of mental illness

## Reflection Point

### Notes:

Feeling overwhelmed, Isabella calls you - the one friend she still feels close to. She tells you what's been going on. She says, "I can't fix any of this. Everything feels overwhelming and I feel hopeless. This is the only way out." As Isabella's friend, what would be helpful to say to Isabella? Pick the best answer.



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Correct	Choice	Feedback
No	You have so much to be thankful for! I'm sure these feelings will pass.	While you may feel you are giving helpful and encouraging advice, it is important to acknowledge how Isabella is feeling. Being empathetic and fostering continued communication is important. Try again.
Yes	I care about you and I want to help. Are you having thoughts of suicide?	Good Thinking. Do not be afraid to use the word "suicide" in your conversation with Isabella. Sometimes, asking directly is the best thing you can do. It is always helpful to remind her she is not alone.
No	You just need to learn how to adjust and make changes.	Although sincere, what may seem encouraging could ultimately make Isabella feel that you are downplaying what she is going through. Try again.

## Isabella Reaches Out

### Notes:

After Isabella tells you about her suicidal thoughts, you ask her if she would be willing to call the local crisis hotline which would help her connect with a local mental health authority or the national suicide prevention lifeline. You remind her you will be right beside her the whole time. She reluctantly agrees.

A Mobile Crisis Outreach Team, a team of trained mental health professionals available for 24/7, 365-day support, does a crisis assessment. This team is trained to help people connect to physical or mental health services. In having conversations with this team of support, Isabella realizes that her recent job loss and stressors had triggered feelings of depression and anxiety and that she can seek treatment through medication. Isabella also receives options for psychiatrists and therapists with whom she can discuss what she has been experiencing.



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## Reflection Point

### Notes:

After Isabella hangs up the phone, you follow-up with her to see how she feels. She says her stress is still present, but she feels more hopeful about her ability to deal with it. Which of the following would be positive ways to respond to Isabella? Select all that apply.

Correct	Choice	Feedback
No	I'm so glad you're better! I knew you would get through this.	This statement fails to acknowledge that a person doesn't just get better overnight. When communicating with someone, remember that recovery is a continual process.
Yes	Do you know what to do if your suicidal thoughts come back?	That's right. It is important to make sure the person has a plan for action in the future.
Yes	It's normal if some days are harder than others. I'll be here no matter what.	Good choice. A statement like this recognizes the person's feelings and acknowledges that not every day will be easy. It reminds the person that no matter what they are experiencing, they are not alone and you will be present.
No	I'm so relieved. Let's never go through that again, okay?	A statement like this may make the person feel like what they experienced was a burden to you. It's also important to recognize that suicidal thoughts might come and go. Isabella might experience something similar in the future.

## **Statistic: By This Point**

### **Notes:**

In the time it took to reach this point, another suicide could have occurred. But it does not have to.

## **Wisdom from Confucius**

### **Notes:**

“It does not matter how slowly you go, as long as you do not stop.” Confucius

## **Crucial Steps**

### **Notes:**

Whether you are the person struggling with suicidal thoughts, or you are helping someone who is having these thoughts, the following steps are important. Click each step to learn more.

### **Step 1**

Coping statements are things people can say to themselves while they are having suicidal thoughts to provide comfort or distraction. Examples of these statements include:

- This thought is temporary, and it does not control me.
- This is my condition talking, not me.
- There are other ways to deal with my pain, even if I don't see them right now.
- Suicidal thoughts are information, not a solution.



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## **Step 2**

Suicidal thoughts become stronger in isolation. It is important for people who are suicidal to stay surrounded by caring and supportive people. People who are suicidal are in emotional pain, and being around caring systems of support can help ease that pain.

## **Step 3**

If the person is at immediate risk of harming themselves, then it is best to stay with the person and call your local crisis hotline or 911. If calling 911, ask for a Mental Health Officer or a Crisis Intervention Team. They may be able to send a Mobile Crisis Outreach Team to do an assessment and recommend next steps. Your presence alone can play a huge role in keeping them safe during their more challenging moments. Getting to a safe place also involves removing access to alcohol and drugs, as these substances can impair judgment, trigger depressive symptoms, and worsen suicidal thoughts.

Developing a safety plan for when the thoughts resurface is also important. The person can sit with their therapist or the crisis response team to complete a safety plan to keep with them.

## **Treatment Options**

### **Notes:**

Coping statements and self-help techniques are useful for boosting someone's sense of well-being, but not for overcoming feelings of severe distress and hopelessness. When suicidal thoughts are more than fleeting, professional help is strongly recommended. Under professional care, medications can help reduce the intensity of distress and negative thoughts that may drive someone to consider suicide. Sometimes when someone views suicide as a solution to their problems, they need professional help to see their way through to the other side.

In addition to medications, therapy can provide a safe and nonjudgmental environment to explore what someone is experiencing and to find a path forward. Guided by a therapist, a person can learn how to challenge the negative thoughts that are behind their ideas of suicide. This helps the person regain a more balanced view of themselves and their life that includes the positive aspects they may have lost sight of.



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There are many types of therapy that can help in reducing thoughts of suicide. One specific treatment is Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, or DBT. DBT helps people learn skills to manage suicidal thoughts and behaviors and has been shown to decrease suicidal behaviors.

Multiple tools are available to help those who experience suicidal thoughts. There is always hope.

## Reflection Point

### **Notes:**

When Carlos experiences suicidal thoughts, he automatically pulls a card with some handwritten lines, along with his phone, from his pocket. Reciting the words on that card often gives him reassurance, but he also has his therapist at the top of his contacts list just in case. What crucial steps and treatment options does he seem to be using? Drag all correct steps onto his sign.

Choice	Correct
Be surrounded by supportive loved ones.	No
Develop suicide coping statements.	Yes
Get to a safe place and develop a plan for safety.	Yes
Work with a therapist.	Yes
Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)	No
Seek professional help and possibly medication.	Yes

### **Feedback when correct:**

Good thinking. Carlos seems to have a plan that he automatically follows anytime he experiences suicidal thoughts. Reciting the lines on the card shows that he is using coping statements, and he also seems to be working with a professional therapist.



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### ***Try again feedback:***

Carlos is definitely practicing some of the crucial steps and using at least one treatment option that we've discussed. You may not have found all the right answers, or you may have picked another one by mistake. Try again.

### ***Feedback when incorrect:***

Let's review. Carlos seems to have a plan that he automatically follows anytime he experiences suicidal thoughts. Reciting the lines on the card shows that he is using coping statements, and he also seems to be working with a professional therapist.

## **Wisdom from Jean Kerr**

### ***Notes:***

"Hope is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn't permanent." Jean Kerr

## **Nurturing Skills**

### ***Notes:***

Nurturing positive skills can go a long way for those experiencing suicidal thoughts. Hope, forgiveness, and giving back can all play a role in helping people find peace within themselves, experience belonging in their world, and believe in a better future.

### ***Hope***

A person's best defense against suicidal thoughts is hope. Helping people ask themselves, "what brings feelings of hope to my life?" can be an important coping strategy. One way to accomplish this is through a "Hope Box," - a collection of hopeful reminders for when times get hard to manage. The box might include letters, photos of positive moments, quotes or spiritual verses, memories of funny times, or anything else that reminds the person of what is positive in their lives.



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## ***Forgiveness***

Fostering an ability to forgive both the self and others is crucial. Those who have suicidal thoughts might feel like a burden which can lead to keeping their thoughts inside. Self-forgiveness means having compassion for oneself and overcoming these feelings of being a burden. Practicing forgiveness for others reinforces social connections, builds empathy, and increases a sense of belonging.

## ***Giving Back***

Thoughts of suicide are often accompanied by a decreased sense of self-worth. Those who do volunteer work often see how their actions in serving others can reshape their own perspectives while providing feelings of hope and gratitude. Restoring hope for another person helps directly counter thoughts of worthlessness. Working with others in need may even rejuvenate feelings of gratitude. It may be hard to see what you have when isolated from the world. Through serving and giving, we reconnect with our appreciation of what we have and how much it matters to us.

## **Wisdom from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross**

### ***Notes:***

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths.” Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

## **Bringing It All Together**

### ***Notes:***

Those who wrestle with suicidal thoughts may think and feel that they have nothing to offer the world. Isolation and a lack of belonging can reinforce this feeling. It is important to remind those in your life who may be struggling that their experiences, both positive and those that feel harder to manage, are part of what gives them a unique perspective in the world. Their experiences may give them a particular ability to relate to the challenges of others. They may be



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able to share more compassion and empathy. They are not a burden, but a gift. Your openness and compassion can play an important role in giving them hope for the future.

## Additional Resources

### Notes:

If you are having suicidal thoughts, or know someone who is, then it is important you reach out to someone who you feel can be supportive and nonjudgmental. If you are unable to identify someone like this in your life, then the following resources are free and available to you at any time. In addition to these, other agency information is available to you in the Resources section of this online training.

- Suicide prevention lifeline: 1-800-273- TALK (8255)
- Crisis text line: text HOME to 741741
- Online chat: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
- Find your local mental or behavioral health authority through hhs.texas.gov, or click [HERE](#)

If you want to learn more specific tools for helping someone in crisis or who is facing other mental health issues, we also recommend looking at the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) evidence-based training at <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>.

## Knowledge Check Instructions

### Notes:

Knowledge Check. It's time to practice what you've learned! This is a five-question quiz.

## Knowledge Check Question 1

### Notes:

True or false? Asking someone if they are having suicidal thoughts will make them more likely to kill themselves.

Correct	Choice
No	TRUE



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Correct	Choice
Yes	FALSE

***Feedback when correct:***

Good thinking. Asking someone will probably make them less likely to attempt suicide.

***Feedback when incorrect:***

Let's review. False was the correct answer. Asking someone will probably make them less likely to attempt suicide.

## Knowledge Check Question 2

***Notes:***

True or False? Suicide rates are increasing only in teenagers and the elderly.

Correct	Choice
No	TRUE
Yes	FALSE

***Feedback when correct:***

That is correct. Suicide rates are increasing in all age groups.

***Feedback when incorrect:***

Let's review. False was the correct answer. Suicide rates are increasing in all age groups.



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## Knowledge Check Question 3

### **Notes:**

True or false? Only lethal suicide attempts should be taken seriously.

Correct	Choice
No	TRUE
Yes	FALSE

### **Feedback when correct:**

That's right. All suicide attempts should be taken seriously.

### **Feedback when incorrect:**

Consider this. False was the correct answer. All suicide attempts should be taken seriously.

## Knowledge Check Question 4

### **Notes:**

John is a 68-year-old married white male who recently retired. He was diagnosed with diabetes in his 40s and is now having kidney trouble. He is on a fixed income and is having difficulty making ends meet each year. What are his risk factors for suicide? Type your answer here.

### **Feedback:**

That was good thinking. John's risk factors for suicide include being white, male, and elderly, having socioeconomic struggles, and having a chronic mental health condition.



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## Knowledge Check Question 5

### **Notes:**

Your friend, Marina, has experienced difficult changes over the past few weeks. She's been feeling sad since and stopped spending time with friends. You go over to her apartment and she tells you, "I don't feel like living anymore." What is your next step?

Correct	Choice
No	Call 911.
Yes	Ask her more about her thoughts.
No	See if she wants to go do a fun activity with you.
No	Encourage her that her feelings are temporary, and they will pass.

### **Feedback when correct:**

Good response. You should ask Marina more about her thoughts but be prepared to call 911 if she is a danger to herself or others.

### **Feedback when incorrect:**

Think again. You should ask Marina more about her thoughts but be prepared to call 911 if she is a danger to herself or others.



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